

Monitoring Report on General Education
University of Wisconsin – La Crosse
January, 2009

Team Concerns (Assurance Section): The 1996 North Central Accreditation review team could not judge the effectiveness of the General Education Program and recommended that “if the program is to provide the foundation of liberal learning for students, campus-wide commitment must be reaffirmed and stable leadership and administration be assured.” The current team has found that while there is support for a comprehensive broad-based general education program, there is a lack of consensus on what would constitute such program. At several of the team’s meetings, faculty expressed their preference for a course-based or discipline-based system rather than for an outcome-based general education program. Progress toward the development and implementation of learning outcomes is evident at the time of this visit, but inconsistencies exist between programs. The campus needs to establish cohesive operational definitions of the required program learning outcomes. The evidence presented indicated the persistent lack of campus-wide commitment or involvement, despite the prior recommendation.

Team Recommendations (Advancement Section): Learning outcomes and the General Education curriculum should be consistent with the newly adopted mission of the General Education program. It is incumbent upon the Faculty Senate Leadership to complete the revisions to the General Education curriculum currently being discussed.

The team is not recommending any particular General Education program or approach, believing strongly both that both of these decisions are the purview of the faculty and that the UW-L faculty have a sense of where they wish to go with general education. The team simply and very strongly recommends and urges the faculty to complete the revision of the General Education program, including developing a plan for systematically assessing this program, and then implement it.

The two primary issues identified by the team included 1) making decisions about the revisions to the general education program, and 2) developing a plan to assess the general education program. Indeed, since the HLC visit to UW-L in April, 2006, the faculty have made considerable progress on both of these issues. The General Education Program is overseen by the General Education Committee (GEC), a committee of the faculty senate. The GEC is charged by and reports to the faculty senate. The issues identified by the HLC team have guided the majority of the work of the committee over the last two years, as identified in the faculty senate charges to the GEC as well as the GEC identified goals.

Faculty senate charges to the GEC since the HLC visit have included the following (see Appendix A for complete charge letters):

2006-2007 Academic Year Charges:

- August, 2006: Submit a proposal on revisions/changes to the general education program by the end of the fall 2006 semester. The proposal should include:
 1. a literature review about the rationale for the proposed revisions/changes, with examples of other institutions that have similar programs.

2. an explanation of how current general education courses, or examples courses, will integrate into the revisions/changes.
 3. an explanation of how the student learning outcomes will be met by the revisions/changes.
- March, 2007: Submit a timeline for a comprehensive and systematic plan of assessment to faculty senate by the General Education committee no later than April 9, 2007.

2007-2008 Academic Year Charges:

- November, 2007: The Senate Executive Committee requests that the GEC present the GEC approved revisions to the university core program at the faculty senate meeting of February 16, 2008. The Senate Executive committee encourages the GEC to review the results of a survey of the faculty regarding the proposed revisions as well as the approved revisions to date.

2008-2009 Academic Year Charges:

- September, 2008: The committee should remain in close contact with the ad hoc Assessment Committee and recommend steps to implement policies consistent with their assessment data. The committee might also consider a moratorium on changes to the General Education/University Core for the 2008-09 academic year until such assessment data is available.
- September, 2008: Review assessment plans that are submitted to the assessment committee to determine the degree to which they comply with stated objectives.

The GEC identified goals have included:

2007-2008:

- Assessment
- Create a vision of general education that is achievable financially
- Manage traditional rivalries

2008-2009

- Assessment
- General Education Director position need
- Student Learning Outcome analysis/Combine redundant Student Learning Outcomes
- Decide: Freshman Tier requirement/FYE courses

Revisions to the General Education Program

The GEC evaluated various recommendations for revisions to the general education program (see Appendix B for reviewed proposals). As the GEC discussed the potential revisions, members were mindful of the budgetary implications (e.g., staffing needs for a required first-year experience course, staffing needs for a required civic engagement experience), credit load and flexibility (i.e., how changes in requirements would impact student credit load for specific majors), the need for faculty to come to consensus about any proposed revisions, and the need for revisions to be evidenced-based. As discussions proceeded, it became clear that without assessment data regarding how the current general education program was working, it would be difficult to make decisions regarding proposed revisions. Specifically, many GEC committee members and other faculty expressed concern about making revisions to better meet the approved student learning outcomes (see Appendix C) when the student learning outcomes had not yet been mapped to the current program. Furthermore, as UW-L, like many other institutions of higher education, is facing budgetary constraints, any revisions requiring an

increase in staffing needs in general education would need to be offset in some manner. The faculty were concerned that any such changes in staffing needs be supported by assessment data. Finally, without assessment data, the faculty were unlikely to come to consensus about a general education program that would best meet the needs of students at UW-L. In fact, a survey of the faculty in fall 2007 found that the majority of faculty supported the current general education program and failed to support recommended revisions (see Appendix D for survey results).

Therefore, on February 14, 2008, the faculty senate, based on a recommendation from the GEC voted to eliminate the proposed revisions to the general education program to date. Instead, the campus community would focus on comprehensive and systematic assessment the current general education program. Assessment results will then be used to generate future recommendations regarding revisions to the general education program.

Assessment of the General Education Program

Based on discussions regarding the need for assessment results to guide any proposed revisions to the general education program, in April 2007, the faculty senate approved an assessment timeline for the general education program (see Appendix E). The timeline provided some general guidance about an assessment plan that included both course embedded and university-wide assessment of the general education program. The timeline did not include specific methods of assessment but rather required a systematic and comprehensive assessment plan be developed by fall 2007. Furthermore, the timeline included a request for budgetary support of assessment efforts. In response to the faculty senate, in the summer of 2007, the Interim Provost appointed a task force to develop the assessment plan for the general education program. Incorporating the recommendations included in the timeline, the plan included both course embedded as well as university-wide assessments. Additionally, the plan included directives for both direct and indirect assessment methods (see Appendix F). Finally, the plan made recommendations regarding infrastructure changes to support assessment efforts.

Assessment Infrastructure

The general education assessment plan proposed an assessment infrastructure that included four entities: 1) an assessment coordinator, 2) an assessment advisory committee, 3) the general education committee, and 4) departmental assessment liaisons. The assessment coordinator position did not exist at the time the plan was developed, hence constituted a new position with budgetary implications. The assessment coordinator would be responsible for collecting, analyzing, and disseminating university-wide assessment data, as well as providing support to departments who might request it. The Assessment Coordinator would coordinate the flow of information from various committees and departments, but would not make curricular recommendations. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, primarily including budgetary implications, the creation of the assessment coordinator position was delayed until fall 2008. The university began a search for an assessment coordinator with hopes to have filled the position in early spring 2009, however in late December, 2008, the Chancellor announced a hiring freeze. Therefore, the search was temporarily halted. It is expected to resume in summer 2009 for a fall start date.

Like the assessment coordinator position, the Assessment Advisory Committee also constituted a new entity. In February 2008, the faculty senate approved the creation of a new General Education Assessment Committee that is charged by and makes recommendations to the GEC (see Appendix G for 2008-2009, and 2009-2010 charges to the General Education Assessment

Committee). In doing so, the faculty senate slightly modified the roles and responsibilities of the committee from those described in the original assessment plan. The absence of an assessment coordinator to date also necessitated some minor changes in the General Education Assessment Committee's activities. In general, the committee has primary responsibility for reviewing departmental assessment plans and course embedded assessment data and reporting the data to the GEC so that the GEC can use the data to inform potential curricular revisions.

As described in the assessment plan, the GEC is responsible for holding departments accountable for engaging in the assessment process and using the assessment results in decision making. The plan gives the GEC the authority to revoke the general education status for courses if departments fail to make a good faith effort in executing the assessment plan. The GEC also has responsibility for reviewing the data and recommendations received from the General Education Assessment Committee and proposing any needed revisions to the general education program based on those data and recommendations.

The Departmental Assessment Liaisons would have the responsibility of relaying information between the assessment coordinator and the liaison's department. In the absence of an assessment coordinator, these individuals have not yet been identified.

General Education Assessment Processes

As mentioned, the general education assessment plan calls for course embedded and university wide assessment, as well as direct and indirect methods.

Course Embedded Assessment Processes: The GEC charge to the General Education Assessment Committee for the 2007-2008 academic year included developing a simple form for departmental reporting of course embedded assessment results, providing assessment learning opportunities workshops for faculty, serving as a resource for departments, collecting the course embedded assessment data, and preparing a report for the GEC to inform modifications of the general education program. The committee was instructed to base its work on the General Education Assessment plan.

In spring 2008, the GEC required all departments to chose one to three general education student learning outcomes for each of their general education courses. Courses with multiple instructors were required to have one to three common student learning outcomes. This identification process served two needs. First, the student learning outcomes approved by the faculty senate in 2005 were mapped to the current program allowing the GEC to evaluate the coverage of the student learning outcomes across the program (see Appendix H for a map of general education student learning outcomes by course). The GEC members have been discussing possible revisions to the student learning outcomes based on the results of the mapping exercise during fall 2008. Second, departments are using their identified student learning outcomes as a basis for assessment in their courses via the following process. Departments choose one specific student learning outcome for each general education courses and submit their assessment tool and scoring rubric for that outcome via a web-based reporting form (see <http://www.uwlax.edu/gened/Assessment.htm> for the submission website). The General Education Committee reviews the assessment tool and accepts or rejects the assessment proposal. Once departments have an approved plan, they collect data and submit results of the assessment. Additionally, departments are required to provide a brief description about how the data will be used and any curricular changes made based on the data. To date 99% of the 105 general education courses required to submit assessment plans have done so. Seventy-nine percent of the proposals have been approved, 12% were denied initial approval

and are under revision, and the remaining are currently under review. Departments are currently in the process of collecting course embedded data and submitting the results on the website developed by the General Education Assessment Committee. Departments are expected to submit data for fall classes by the end of the semester. The General Education Assessment Committee will begin to analyze and summarize the data during spring 2009. They will then prepare a summary of the result for presentation to the GEC, who will review the summary and consider any potential implications for the general education program. Departments are expected to assess courses not offered in fall 2008 during the semester they are next taught. The General Education Assessment Committee will review those data as they are submitted and report the findings to the GEC.

The GEC also charged the General Education Assessment Committee with providing resources for departments to support assessment activities. The General Education Assessment plan called for workshop in either May or August of 2008. The General Education Assessment Committee worked with the Center for the Advancing Teaching and Learning to offer two workshops on developing course embedded assessment tools in August 2008. About 80 instructors attended the sessions. The purpose of the workshop was to introduce instructors to the course embedded approach to assessment of general education learning outcomes and help departmental teams develop assessment tools. The sessions focused on how to use existing course materials (e.g., course assignments, exercises, test questions) or develop new assessment tasks and rubrics to measure student achievement with respect to general education learning outcomes. Teams also reviewed the online submission process.

The Center for the Advancing Teaching and Learning is planning a second opportunity for faculty to refine assessment tools or develop new ones. Specifically, the Center will be sponsoring a local CLA in the Classroom workshop. The CLA in the Classroom was designed by the staff at the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), and teaches faculty how to create a performance task (modeled after performance tasks on the CLA) and a scoring rubric for that task tailored to their individual courses. While faculty can travel to various locations to attend a two day workshop conducted by CLA staff, the staff also will come to an individual campus to conduct one day workshop. The UW-L CLA in the Classroom workshop is scheduled for January 16, 2009.

Finally, the General Education Assessment Committee has developed and posted a number of resources on the General Education website (see <http://www.uwlax.edu/gened/Assessment.htm>). The website provides resources for course embedded assessments including documents describing general procedures and deadlines (see Appendix I) and an overview of assessment tasks and rubrics (see Appendix J). The website also provides instructions given to departments about choosing student learning outcomes for general education courses. Finally, departments can find the General Education Assessment plan and information from previous assessment activities on the site.

University-Wide Assessment Activities. The General Education Assessment plan recommended three university-wide assessment tools/activities: 1) the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), 2) the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), and 3) faculty, student, and alumni surveys. The assessment plan recommended that the Assessment Consultant have primary responsibility for overseeing these activities. The university did administer the CLA and the NSSE during the 2007-2008 academic year. In the absence of an Assessment Coordinator, however, the faculty, students, and alumni surveys have been postponed.

Results of the CLA suggest UW-L is providing students with an education that helps them develop their writing and critical thinking skills (see Appendix K for the Executive Summary of CLA Results). First year students' Total CLA score was "at" the expected performance level, while the seniors' was "well above." As a result, the *value added*, or the learning gains made by UW-L students was greater than 96 percent of institutions that participated in the CLA (see Table 1 for CLA subtest scores).

While CLA scores are related to a student's entire educational experience, not just general education, results can be used as part of the assessment of the general education program. The GEC expects to discuss these results and any implications for the general education program in spring 2009.

Table 1. *Percentage Ranks of Deviation Scores of UW-L Students*

Percentile Ranks for Deviation Scores				
(Deviation Score = Difference between Actual Score and Expected Score)				
Task	Freshmen Percentile Rank	Performance Level	Senior Percentile Rank	Performance Level
Total CLA Score	39	At	92	Well above
Performance Task	35	At	86	Well above
Analytic Writing Tasks	51	At	89	Above
Make-an-Argument	71	Above	70	At
Critique-an-Argument	27	Below	97	Well above

Source: Assessment of Student Learning at UW-L website (<http://www.uwlax.edu/provost/assessment/assess.htm>)

UW-L has administered the NSSE regularly since 1999 (see Appendix L for the Executive Summary of the 2008 NSSE administration). A number of items measure activities related to UW-L's student learning outcomes, but one item asks, in particular, about general education. Specifically, respondents are asked the following question, "To what extent has your experience at this institution contributed to your personal knowledge, skills, and development in acquiring a broad general education?" Results suggest that UW-L has made gains in this area in recent years. First, both first year and senior students' average score on the item have increased over the last eight years. Additionally, UW-L seniors scored above average when compared to peers at similar Masters level institutions in 2008. In previous years, UW-L seniors scored at or below average (see Table 2).

Table 2. *Mean Scores on NSSE General Education Question, 2000 to 2008 (even years)*

Year	First Year			Senior		
	UW-L	Carnegie Peers	Effect Size	UW-L	Carnegie Peers	Effect Size
2008	3.21	3.17		3.36	3.26***	.13
2006	3.17	3.09		3.25	3.22	
2004	3.21	3.14		3.19	3.30**	-.14
2002	3.08	3.09		3.13	3.25	-.14
2000	3.05	3.10		3.19	3.34	

Source: Assistant to the Provost

The GEC committee expects to discuss the results of the most recent NSSE administration and any implications for the general education program in spring 2009.

Assessment Implications. The General Education Assessment plan recognizes the need for departments and the GEC to use assessment data for curricular decisions. The plan gives the GEC authority to eliminate courses from the general education program if a department does not follow the general education assessment plan. Specifically, the plan states, "The General Education Committee has the option to revoke the university core status of any course if a department does not make a good faith effort to; 1) develop a common assessment instrument for a student learning outcome, 2) administer the instrument in all sections of the course, and 3) analyze and discuss the results to develop a departmental action plan" (see Appendix F). In addition, the General Education Assessment plan recommends an evaluation of the entire assessment process. First, on a biennial basis, the General Education Assessment Committee will review the assessment data and processes and make recommendations to improve the process (e.g., are the data useful, is the timeline appropriate, are samples representative, are rubric guidelines helpful, are departments getting information that they find useful). Second, the plan recommends UW-L's general education assessment procedures be reviewed by external bodies every five years. One review will consist of the HLC review our assessment processes and plans during their comprehensive visit to UW-L. In addition, between accreditation reviews, the plan recommends that UW-L hire an assessment consultant external to the university (e.g., from the Association of American Colleges and Universities) to review the processes and plans.

Conclusions

UW-L has made considerable progress toward remedying the challenges identified by the HLC team in their review of the general education program. First, while the team did not recommend any particular general education program, the members did press the UW-L faculty to complete any revisions to the program. After considerable discussion of potential revisions, the faculty concluded that there was insufficient data to support any changes at this time. The decision to repudiate revisions at the current time does not preclude revisions in the future as assessment data are collected and evaluated. Second, the HLC team urged the faculty to develop a plan to assess the general education program and to implement that plan. Such a plan was developed and approved during the summer and fall of 2007. The university has been collecting both university-wide and course embedded data according to the plan since fall 2007. The initial round of course embedded data collection will be concluded by the end of fall 2008, and the General Education Assessment Committee will summarize the results for the GEC during spring 2009. In recognition of the importance of using data to inform decisions, the General Education Assessment plan requires a two-pronged approach to curricular revisions. First, departments are required to submit a description of changes made within their specific courses based on the data. Second, the GEC will review a summary of the course embedded assessment data, as well as the university-wide assessment data to inform revisions among courses to improve the general education program as a whole. Finally, in the spirit of continuous improvement, the General Education Assessment plan recommends several forms of review of the processes being implemented to assure the data being collected are useful in informing curricular revisions.